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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 4106

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 000142

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS, AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/15/2018

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: UNKNOWN GUNMEN ATTACK POLICE AND MILITARY UNITS

REF: 2007 MASERU 340

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher M. Smith, P/DEP Officer, P/DEP,
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A group of six unknown gunmen attacked several Lesotho military and police units on the evening of May 13, seizing official weapons but leaving their victims unharmed. A prominent military representative confirmed the basic outline of these events to Emboff, including a police allegation that the gunmen exchanged fire with a joint Lesotho and South African police operation. The motives of these attacks are unknown.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) According to a May 15 Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) press release, on the evening of May 13 approximately six men dressed in army fatigues traveling in two vehicles attacked army and police units at Ha Tsolo (in the Maseru suburbs) and a roving Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) patrol in Maseru West before proceeding north along the South African border to Maputsoe and engaging in a firefight with LMPS and South African Police Service (SAPS) units. No one was injured. Further north in Butha Buthe, the same men allegedly bound an officer of Lesotho's National Security Service (NSS) and left him by the side of the road.

¶3. (U) Police later found the two vehicles used in the attacks abandoned, one of which was destroyed. Police allege that 59-year-old Makotoko Lerotholi, one of the individuals whom the GOL accuses of perpetrating similar attacks in 2007 on ministerial residences (reftel) and now in self-imposed exile in South Africa, was identified at the scene of one of the incidents. [NOTE: Lerotholi phoned Harvest FM radio station on the morning on May 15 and stated that he is still bedridden in Johannesburg. END NOTE.]

¶4. (C) On May 15, Brigade Commander Brigadier Mahao confirmed to A/RSO that attacks on GOL security units did take place, although he demurred on offering further details. Embassy contacts within the GOL said that the cabinet subcommittee on security held an emergency session on the attacks on the morning on May 14.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The motives of the attackers remain unknown, although their modus operandi (use of camouflage fatigues and automatic guns, seizure of official weapons, and leaving their victims unharmed) is reminiscent of similar attacks that took place in 2007 during an intense post-election political impasse (reftel). The current political climate is calm, however, making the latest attacks even more mysterious. END COMMENT.

NOLAN